

Views on the Mississippi: the Photographs of Henry Peter Bosse

Patrick Nunnally

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Views on the Mississippi: The Photographs of Henry Peter Bosse, by Mark Neuzil. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. xv, 253 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewer Patrick Nunnally is a consultant whose work focuses on the history and landscapes of the upper Mississippi Valley.

The Mississippi River is a hot topic these days. Over the past 200 years, its importance has ebbed and flowed in response to a number of historical, cultural, and technological factors. Currently, river towns are working hard to revitalize their connections to the "Father of Waters" after decades of neglect. Ecologists are learning what natural systems are still operational in and along the river, and devising strategies to enhance the river's ecological quality. Commercial navigation interests are advocating for the river's increased use as a transportation system. Mark Neuzil's book is a welcome sign that the river is becoming of greater interest to scholars and writers as well. The literature of the river includes many bad books—sloppy, careless, unattractive—but this is a very good one.

The center of this book, appropriately, is a selection of the photographs taken by Henry Peter Bosse in the 1880s and 1890s. Bosse, a German-born draftsman, worked as a mapmaker for the United States Army Corps of Engineers in its Rock Island Illinois office from 1874 until his death in 1903. For over a decade, between 1883 and 1893, he took a series of photographs of the upper Mississippi's landscapes, towns, bridges, and other distinctive features. These photographs were made during the period when the Corps was constructing wing dams, closing dams, and other features to change the river's flow and improve navigation. They are an extraordinarily valuable record of this place and time. They illustrate vividly "the river we have lost" and its complexity: the myriad channels, floodplain farms and forests, riverside towns, and the many bridges and steamboats that carried people and goods over and on it. Bosse's blue prints, created through the cyanotype process and reproduced in large format in this book, retain exceptional detail and clarity. Neuzil has arranged 95 of these photographs in a downstream journey, beginning just below St. Anthony Falls in Minneapolis and ending at St. Louis.

The photographs themselves are the main attraction in the book, and Neuzil wisely stays out of their way. His introduction provides what few details of Bosse's life and career have been found, and contextualizes the photographs by discussing them in relation to the Corps' navigation improvement project, and as part of the late nineteenth-century pattern of government-sponsored photography. With each photograph, Neuzil provides short bits of information about the

subject and its historical context, and about the image itself. Merry Foresta, senior curator of photography at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, discusses in her foreword the myriad ways photography shapes what we see and understand about landscape.

It is almost churlish to find fault with this outstanding work, but there is one place where Neuzil and his editors could have improved it. The last section of the book reproduces Bosse's map of the upper Mississippi, made contemporaneously with his photographs. River experts will be able to read the map and brief accompanying notes and recognize the changes in the landscape between then and now. Scholars of cartography, of course, will appreciate the map as a document in and of itself. But the broader audience—and this book certainly strives for and deserves to reach a broad audience of nonspecialists—will not get as much out of the reproduced map as it would if there were some better efforts to match its "then" with some image of "now." Juxtaposing Bosse's map with current Corps river navigation charts would allow viewers to orient themselves and also drive home the point about how drastically we have changed this landscape in just over 100 years.

Bosse's photographs deserve to be known by every scholar, educator, and interpretive program on the upper Mississippi, and Neuzil's book is an excellent vehicle for their dissemination.

Keokuk and the Great Dam, by John E. Hallwas. Images of America Series. Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2001. 128 pp. Illustrations. \$18.99 paper.

Reviewer John O. Anfinson is a historian for the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, a unit of the National Park System. His book, *The River We Have Wrought: A History of the Upper Mississippi River*, is due out in early 2003.

Keokuk and the Great Dam is a historical travelog. Through some 160 captioned illustrations (mostly photographs), John E. Hallwas documents the origins and construction of the Keokuk, Iowa, hydroelectric project. Keokuk lies at the foot of the Des Moines Rapids, on the upper Mississippi River. The rapids made navigation at low water treacherous but offered the potential for hydropower. Boosters in Keokuk had long hoped to subdue the rapids and capture the river's power. The purpose of his book, says Hallwas, is to get people to appreciate the project that achieved both dreams. When completed in 1913, the powerhouse was the largest in the world, and the power line, which ran 144 miles to St. Louis, the longest. The dam's reservoir extended over 60 miles upstream, flooding the rapids. The project, Hallwas claims, is "the largest privately funded construction project in world history" (8).

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